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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CABINET, 1688-1760

### PART II

THE period of the first two Georges is beyond all others the era when cabinet government began in England. During those years the great lords and politicians, once servants and advisers, became advisers and masters of the crown. Steadily the king was deprived of authority until he himself confessed it and ceased to protest.<sup>1</sup> During those years power passed from the king and Privy Council alike to small groups of men, lords of the committee, lords of the cabinet council, lords justices, and smaller circles of powerful leaders, who silently and in private guided the destinies of the nation. By 1760 the process was complete for the time being. Neither king at Kensington nor Parliament at Westminster then ruled the nation, but a small group of important political leaders meeting apart at the call of their leaders.

In 1714 the executive both legally and actually was the king, though his power had been dwindling steadily since 1688. The prerogative of the sovereign was still very great, and even after this time royal authority declined less rapidly than has sometimes been supposed; nevertheless, prerogative was waning, and a transfer of power was taking place from the sovereign to the confidential advisers of the crown, the lords of the cabinet council. It is true that the body which assisted the king in the rule of the realm was supposed to be his Privy Council, but little authority remained to it except in formal and customary procedure, such as the issuing of writs for new elections, the proroguing of Parliament or convocation, the giving out of proclamations and orders of council, and the granting or denying of petitions and memorials, all of which was now usually done without protest or debate, as a result of decisions made previously and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The important work of the Privy Council was being done by the committee of council, a standing committee of the whole Privy Council. By 1714 cabinet and com-

<sup>1</sup> "‘Your Ministers, sir, are only your instruments of government.’ This was too much for Royal patience. The King smiled and said bitterly, ‘Ministers are the King in this country.’” Account by Lord Hardwicke of an interview with the king, January 5, 1745. Quoted in W. M. Torrens, *History of Cabinets*, etc., II. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Southwell, Privy Council Routine, 1692-1695, Add. MSS., 34,349; Privy Council Memoranda, 1660-1708, Add. MSS., 35,107; St. P. Dom., Anne; Duc d’Aumont in Salomon, *Geschichte des letzten Ministeriums Königin Annas*, p. 352.

mittee had approximated to each other so closely that it might almost be said that the members of the committee, meeting in a royal cabinet or apartment to advise the sovereign, made up the cabinet council, while the same men, meeting in Whitehall to prepare and decide the business of the Privy Council, made up the committee of council. In 1714 the cabinet contained fifteen members;<sup>3</sup> apparently in a meeting of the committee there were about the same number.<sup>4</sup>

These two bodies, which were now taking over the executive and administrative work of the nation, though they might well seem to be modes of one and the same thing, were yet fundamentally different in origin and possible development. The committee was and continued to be the essence of the Privy Council, while the cabinet was a confidential and extra-legal council of the sovereign. Notwithstanding that the two had practically the same members, they began now to move along different lines of development. As the importance of the Privy Council continued to decline, the power of the committee dwindled; but as the greatness of the sovereign became less, his power was taken over by the cabinet, which became stronger and ever more important. After 1740, the committee may be the co-worker, but it can no longer be the rival of the cabinet.

In the growth of the cabinet during this period the same phenomenon is seen as earlier in the case of the Privy Council: membership increases until the body becomes unwieldy and relatively ineffective, and as a result its activity and real power are taken over by a small group, an inner circle, or part of the cabinet itself. In the period 1688-1714 the principal interest of the student must be in the double development of the cabinet and the committee of council; in the period 1714-1760 attention should be drawn to the development of the private meeting of ministers, and the gradual emergence of the inner cabinet or "conciliabulum".<sup>5</sup>

The study of this period presents a problem essentially different from that of the years preceding. The development of the cabinet from 1688 to 1714 is difficult to understand because of lack of material, the student having to rely for the most part upon allusion and chance information. His task, then, is to a great extent one of research. In the Hanoverian period, on the other hand, it is possible to accumulate great numbers of actual minutes, memoranda, notes, and records;<sup>6</sup> but these records are most often endorsed

<sup>3</sup> "List of the Cabinet Councill", St. P. Dom., George I., I. 261.

<sup>4</sup> Thirteen in 1718. St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CXIX., April 14, 1718.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H. W. V. Temperley, "Inner and Outer Cabinet and Privy Council, 1679-1783", *English Historical Review*, XXVII. 682.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the materials cf. my "Sources for the History of the English Cabinet in the Eighteenth Century", *Report of the Amer. Hist. Assoc.*, 1911.

simply with a date or with the caption "Minutes".<sup>7</sup> After some investigation, it becomes apparent that these papers, which in content may scarcely be distinguished one from the other, relate to a variety of meetings very different in character; and this diversity is established by the fact that the subsidiary material of the period contains allusions to cabinets, committees of council, private meetings, and inner councils,<sup>8</sup> and a few of the minutes themselves are specifically so endorsed. Accordingly, the problem here is one of interpretation and collation, after reading through bundles of faded and scribbled papers to gather details from the humdrum routine of official business. So elusive and difficult is the material that positive results can scarcely be obtained without a systematic comparison of the entire mass of minutes remaining among the papers of the secretaries of state, in the Public Record Office, with the great body of those to be found among the remains of such officials as Newcastle and Hardwicke, and then interpreting them all in the light of explanations occurring at random in contemporary correspondence and in the diaries of men who attended the meetings, like Lord Hervey and Sir John Norris.

At the beginning of the Hanoverian period the composition of the cabinet was substantially what it had been under William and under Anne. In 1701 Sunderland had advised Somers to admit none to the cabinet council but those "who have, in some sort, a right to enter there by their employment". He specified the Archbishop of Canterbury, the lord keeper, the lord president, the lord privy seal, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the first commissioner of the treasury, the two secretaries of state, and, when he happened to be at hand, the lord lieutenant of Ireland; that is to say, the great officials of the realm. He also suggested, though he did not advise, the addition of the first commissioner of the admiralty and the master of the ordnance.<sup>9</sup> In 1711 the cabinet contained eleven members.<sup>10</sup> In the year following, the Duc d'Aumont wrote an account of it. According to him it consisted of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the lord chancellor, the lord treasurer, the lord president,<sup>11</sup> the lord privy seal, the lord lieutenant of Ireland, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the master of the horse, and the two secretaries of state.<sup>12</sup> In the first year of the

<sup>7</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., George II., Various, *passim*; Newcastle Papers, Add. MSS., 32,993-33,004; Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS., 35,870.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the Journals of Sir John Norris, Add. MSS., 28,132, 28,133.

<sup>9</sup> Hardwicke, *Miscellaneous State Papers*, II. 461.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Harley, jr., to Abigail Harley, March 22, 1710/1. Portland MSS., *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, 15, IV. 669.

<sup>11</sup> Whom he calls "Président du Conseil du Cabinet".

<sup>12</sup> Salomon, *Geschichte des letzten Ministeriums*, pp. 352-356.

reign of George I., the addition of several influential leaders brought the number up to fifteen, including now, as of course, the great officials of the realm and the two secretaries.<sup>13</sup> The increasing importance of national finance also brings the chancellor of the exchequer definitely into the small council, and his name appears along with twelve others in a formal "List of the Cabinet Council" in 1717.<sup>14</sup> In 1729, a summons for a meeting has an endorsement which shows that the cabinet at that time contained fourteen members, including in addition to a number of prominent Whig leaders, such dignitaries as the archbishop, the lord chancellor, the lord privy seal, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the chancellor of the exchequer, and the secretaries of state.<sup>15</sup> In 1738 there were fourteen or more members.<sup>16</sup> The same was true in 1740;<sup>17</sup> while in the year following there were at least fifteen.<sup>18</sup> The number tended to increase slowly. In 1744 it was seventeen or more.<sup>19</sup> In 1757, Newcastle notes that the "Cabinet Council at present" includes sixteen members, while he was at the moment planning to add three more. The entire list included practically all the important officials of the realm: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the lord chancellor, the lord president, the lord privy seal, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the chancellor of the exchequer, three secretaries of state—for Newcastle proposed to add the secretary of state to the Indies—the lord lieutenant of Ireland, the lord chief justice, the first commissioner of the treasury, the first commissioner of the admiralty, the chancellor of Scotland, the master of the ordnance, the master of the horse, and the groom of the stole.<sup>20</sup>

Nor did these large numbers indicate merely nominal membership. Not infrequently the entire body attended for the consideration of some important business. In 1735 eleven members considered the petition of the South Sea Company,<sup>21</sup> while a little later fourteen deliberated upon communications relating to a dispute with Spain.<sup>22</sup> In 1737 the same number assembled to consider what action should be taken with reference to a recent reception of the Pretender's son at Venice.<sup>23</sup> In 1738 such a cabinet decided to give

<sup>13</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., I. 261.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, IX., May, 1717.

<sup>15</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, I., June 9, 1729.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II., February 15, March 14, 1737/8.

<sup>17</sup> Add. MSS., 33,004, ff. 41-43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 46, 47; St. P. Dom., Various, III., January 16, 1740/1.

<sup>19</sup> Add. MSS., 33,004, ff. 58, 59; St. P. Dom., Various, V., February 2, 1743/4.

<sup>20</sup> Newcastle Papers, Add. MSS., 32,997, f. 146. Sir Thomas Robinson is mentioned as "Additional".

<sup>21</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, I., March 12, 1734/5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, April 14, 1735.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II., June 16, 1737.

notice that the king would grant letters of reprisal against Spain.<sup>24</sup> A meeting of fifteen approved a draft of the king's message to the House of Lords in 1739,<sup>25</sup> and a month later advised the king to begin war against Spain.<sup>26</sup> In 1741, when the news reached England that Frederick of Prussia had seized Silesia, a cabinet of fifteen debated the grave question, whether England should fulfil her treaty engagements in support of the Pragmatic Sanction.<sup>27</sup> In 1744, seventeen members met to decide what orders were made necessary by the sailing of the French squadron from Brest.<sup>28</sup> A few days later fourteen considered the advisability of suspending the habeas corpus act;<sup>29</sup> and at this time meetings of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen were held repeatedly.<sup>30</sup> During the crisis of 1745, a meeting of fourteen considered how London might best be defended.<sup>31</sup> Except for very important matters the number now showed a tendency to decline, but meetings of ten, twelve, and thirteen were not unusual.<sup>32</sup>

The increase was owing to the fact that from time to time cabinet leaders found it necessary to admit influential associates in order to gain their support.<sup>33</sup> As early as 1694 William experienced difficulty in restricting the number in his cabinet.<sup>34</sup> In 1720, Lady Cowper spoke of the body as a mob.<sup>35</sup> But during these years, while the cabinet was slowly increasing in numbers, it was also increasing its activity and power, with the result that the leaders were presently compelled to recognize that it was becoming too big to be effective, and too unwieldy for frequent assembly and decisive action. Therefore it was inevitable as time went on that the enlarging cabinet should undergo a change similar to that which had char-

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1737/8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, May 7, 1739.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, June 3, 1739.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, III., January 16, 1740/1; Add. MSS., 28,133, ff. 74, 75; 33,004, ff. 46, 47.

<sup>28</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, V., February 2, 1743/4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, February 16, 1743/4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, February 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, March 2, 5, 1743/4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, December 6, 1745.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, George II., LXXXVI., August 6, 15, 1746; XC., December 15, 1746; XCV., March 26, 1747; XCVII., May 25, 1747; Add. MSS., 35,870, ff. 222, 223 (1751), 226-229 (1753); King's MSS., LXXV., June 29, 1755; Add. MSS., 32,997, f. 207 (1757); 32,998, ff. 382, 383 (1760).

<sup>33</sup> It is probable that Walpole tolerated Newcastle in the latter years of their association because the seats in the Commons controlled by the duke were necessary for the maintenance of his power.

<sup>34</sup> Coxe, *Correspondence of Shrewsbury*, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Describing a reception at St. James's, she says: "Because the *Chancellor* was not to *s'encanailier*, he came alone, and a very little While after, the Mob of the Cabinet, with little *Kent* at their Head." *Diary*, April 27, 1720.

acterized the enlarging Privy Council, namely, that its power should be to a considerable extent taken over by a smaller part of itself.

When this began and exactly what were the specific causes of the change it is not possible to discover now. As a rule, no doubt, the entire membership of the cabinet council was not present at a cabinet meeting, simply because it was inconvenient for all the members to attend. In 1729 and 1730, the cabinet contained at least fourteen persons, but it was seldom that more than half that number assembled.<sup>36</sup> On July 26, 1730, a cabinet of seven at Windsor considered French and Spanish matters.<sup>37</sup> On May 25, 1731, a cabinet of five deliberated whether reprisals should be made upon Spanish commerce in the West Indies.<sup>38</sup> A list of cabinet members in 1729, endorsed "Summons for a Cabinet", contains a note stating that "Bowys has summoned all that are in town". The meeting which followed was attended, probably, by nine.<sup>39</sup> As might be expected, it is the active and important members who are generally present, those merely with great names inherited from the past who stay away. In 1730, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the lord steward, and the lord chamberlain rarely come to the cabinet; Walpole and the secretaries of state are seldom away. They come, doubtless, because they desire to come, and because their presence is necessary for the conduct of business. The great officers of the king's household may attend, and do attend sometimes,<sup>40</sup> but they doubtless discover after a while that their presence is not indispensable, and that they are not able to take an active or influential part as regards matters in which they are not closely engaged. It can only be surmised that this is true, but it is very probable that it is so. Nevertheless, the fact is evident, that of the entire membership of the cabinet council only a part attends, unless the business to be considered is of great solemnity or importance, like drafting the king's speech or advising a declaration of war,<sup>41</sup> and that certain members are usually not present.

This development, as a result of which a part of the cabinet

<sup>36</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, I., June 9, 11, 1729; September 21, 1730; St. P. Dom., George II., XII., June 17, 1729.

<sup>37</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, I., July 26, 1730.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, May 25, 1731.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, June 9, 11, 1729.

<sup>40</sup> For example: the lord privy seal attended July 17 and 26, 1730, and June 30, 1731; the lord president, May 25, June 11, 28, and 30, 1731; the lord chamberlain, June 30, 1731. September 28, 1732, the lord chancellor, the lord president, the lord privy seal, and the lord chamberlain were all present, as they were also October 10. St. P. Dom., Various, I.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. St. P. Dom., Various, I., January 11, 1731/2; V., March 29, 1744; Add. MSS., 33,004, ff. 46, 47.

council tends to become the real and effective cabinet, is facilitated by the device of private meetings of the cabinet members, to which, in course of time, only the most important members are admitted. The private meeting develops when the cabinet meets without the king, in such place and such manner as it pleases.

The cabinet, which was in its origin the private council of the sovereign, met, during the earlier period, only in the royal presence. This was always so under William, and I know of but one doubtful exception under Anne. Such also was the rule when George I. came to the throne. For a while the king continued to attend,<sup>42</sup> and when he could not be present, meetings seem to have been postponed.<sup>43</sup> Even while he was absent in Hanover, in 1716, his place in the cabinet meeting was taken by the Prince of Wales.<sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding, George labored under such great disadvantages that his attendance as well as his leadership in the cabinet soon came to an end. He knew little of the laws or the constitution of the kingdom which he had come to govern, and not knowing the language of his new subjects, could with difficulty converse with his ministers in bad Latin. This in itself placed him entirely at the mercy of his chief officials;<sup>45</sup> but the circumstances of his accession made the very maintenance of his throne dependent upon their support. Accordingly he was neither able to oppose them nor to dispense with their services in the conduct of English affairs;<sup>46</sup> but he was furthermore unable to participate in the conduct of these affairs himself. The result was that the king soon came to the cabinet very infre-

<sup>42</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., VIII., January 29, 1717; IX., June 19, 1717, and *passim*. Also, "There is a Cabinet Council summoned to attend his Majesty at St. James's to Morrow at twelve." George Tilson to Sir Henry Penrice. St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CXXII., July 13, 1721.

<sup>43</sup> "I forgot to ask My Lord whether a Cabinet Council should be summoned for Thursday next and whether for the Morning or Evening in regard to His Maty's drinking the Waters." Delasaye to Tilson. St. P. Dom., George I., IX., August 13, 1717. "I this moment receive yours of the 13th; my Lord says there must be no Cabinet Councill, the King continuing to take the Waters." Tilson to Delasaye. *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CCLXVII., July 13, August 14, 25, October 4, 11, 12, November 15, 16, 1716.

<sup>45</sup> "Cette ignorance de la langue et des affaires . . . n'a pas permis au Roi d'abolir un Conseil que l'ignorance des affaires dans le chef a introduit sous le règne précédent . . . Cette nécessité où S. M. est de continuer ce Conseil le prive d'une infinité de lumières, ne lui fait voir que l'écorce de plusieurs affaires et confère un grand pouvoir à ses ministres." Bonet in Michael, *Englische Geschichte im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, I. 440, note.

<sup>46</sup> "She [the Princess of Wales] said [to the king], 'Sir, I tell you they say the Ministry does Everything, and you Nothing.' He smiled, and said, 'This is all the Thanks I get for all the Pains I take.'" *Diary of Lady Cowper*, February 20, 1716.

quently, though occasional instances can be found as late as 1781.<sup>47</sup>

The withdrawal of the king from the meetings of the cabinet made it no longer necessary to hold the meetings in the royal palace, as had been the case previously. For a long time cabinets did assemble at the king's residence, when it was desirable to communicate with him readily;<sup>48</sup> but after 1720 the vast majority of the meetings were held elsewhere. At first nearly all the gatherings of ministers took place in the office of the secretary of state, in the Cockpit, at Whitehall.<sup>49</sup> Later on they were held wherever the cabinet leaders desired. During the reign of George I., while the meetings were called largely in Whitehall, it is very difficult to distinguish them from meetings of the committee of council, held in the same place;<sup>50</sup> which gives no little speciousness to the theory, sometimes maintained, that the cabinet of the Georges is descended from the committee of council of the period of Anne.<sup>51</sup> It may be that for a while cabinet ministers meeting apart from the king transacted business of state in committees of council at Whitehall as, indeed, they had long been wont to do; and that real cabinet meetings were held only at rare intervals at Kensington or at St. James's. In the absence of specific information, the point is a difficult one to decide; but it is probable that as early as 1719 cabinet meetings, without the king, were held in the Cockpit.<sup>52</sup> There is no doubt,

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Temperley, *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XXVII. 693; C. G. Robertson, *England under the Hanoverians*, pp. 508, 509. The most important instance, probably, is a meeting held at St. James's at the most critical moment of the Rebellion of 1745. Fourteen members assembled to confer with the king. Most of them were present at two other cabinets held at Whitehall the same day. St. P. Dom., Various, V., December 6, 1745. Sir John Norris notes in his Journal, November 14, 1739, "This noon his Majesty had a Cabinet Counsell at St. Jamesis upon his Speech." Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 78.

<sup>48</sup> For example: Hampton Court: St. P. Dom., George I., IX., August 8, 1717. Windsor: St. P. Dom., Various, I., July 9, 12, 17, 26, September 21, 1730. Hampton Court: *ibid.*, June 11, 25, 28, 1731; II., September 9, October 11, 1737. Kensington: *ibid.*, I., September 28, 1732; V., September 20, 24, 1745. St. James's: *ibid.*, V., December 6, 1745.

<sup>49</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., George II., Various, *passim*.

<sup>50</sup> See *ante*, pp. 762-768, of the preceding volume of this journal.

<sup>51</sup> "Das Kabinett König Georgs recht eigentlich die Fortsetzung des 'Committee' und nicht des 'Cabinet Council' Königin Annas ist." Salomon, *Geschichte des letzten Ministeriums*, p. 356, note.

<sup>52</sup> In 1719 a meeting of ten men, all of whom seem to have been members of the cabinet, deliberated about transporting troops to England, and causing the Admiralty to fit out more ships. The record is endorsed "Committee of Council, at the Cockpit". St. P. Dom., George I., XV., March 13, 1718/9. On the same day a meeting of nine was held in the Cockpit. Every name in the list occurs in the list of those present at the meeting of the committee. "The Lords" were of opinion that a proclamation should be issued against persons attainted in the late rebellion, and that rewards should be offered for apprehending them. *Ibid.* These would appear to be two different bodies, though it is possible that we have two sets of minutes of the same meeting.

however, that this gradually came to be the custom.<sup>53</sup> When, in 1739, Sir John Norris was invited to attend meetings of the chief ministers, he records in his diary again and again that he was present at cabinets in the office of the secretary of state in Whitehall,<sup>54</sup> and it would appear from his expressions that cabinets were at that time rarely held in other places.<sup>55</sup>

From assembling in Whitehall to transact cabinet business it was but a single step for members to meet wherever they chose. Accordingly, they are found discussing policy and considering measures in the private houses of some of their number, the most usual place being in the house of the prime minister. At first such meetings were undoubtedly not considered cabinet meetings, but were looked upon merely as private meetings of the ministers who attended.

Private meetings of the king's ministers probably originated in the desire to prepare business for cabinet or council meetings, in order that it might be more expeditiously dealt with when it came up for consideration. It would seem that the ministers of Charles II. did this with some regularity as early as 1680.<sup>56</sup> In 1683 the secretary of state sent out a communication to the effect that "My Ld Keeper and severall other Lds of the Councill having appointed a meeting to be att my hous in old Spring Garden, between 7 and eight of the clock this present Tuesday in the afternoon, you are desired to be there attending at that time."<sup>57</sup> It is probable that a great deal of business was thus settled in a preliminary way. Not only was this quite natural, but, as the cabinet leaders became more and more powerful, and so, less willing to brook interference, it must have seemed both necessary and desirable that they should do much business in this fashion. Particularly when the king ceased attending the cabinet, and when cabinet meetings began to be held at

<sup>53</sup> John Couraud, writing to Newcastle in 1735, says that the answer to be returned to Sir Thomas Fitzgerald is to be settled at a meeting of the "Cabinet Council, which is summoned for Monday next at Your Grace's Office". St. P. Dom., George II., XXXVII., December 13, 1735. In the year following, Lord Harrington summons Sir David Patten in these words: "I am to desire that you will please to attend the Lords of his Majesty's Cabinet Council this Evening at seven o'clock at the Duke of Newcastle's Office in the Cockpit Whitehall, their Lordships meeting there at that hour." St. P. Dom., Entry Books, CXXIX., September 17, 1736.

<sup>54</sup> Sir John Norris, Journals, Add. MSS., 28,132, ff. 34, 51, 71 (1739), 119, 136, 151, 160, 163, 164, 165, 166, 169, 174, 183, 193 (1740); 28,133, ff. 64, 67, 68 (1740), 74 (1741).

<sup>55</sup> He records a meeting at St. James's, November 14, 1739. Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 78.

<sup>56</sup> Lord Keeper Guilford, "Memoranda Historica", Add. MSS., 32,520, f. 253. Cf. North, *Lives of the Norths*, II. 62, 63.

<sup>57</sup> St. P. Dom., Entry Books, LXVIII., April 24, 1683.

Whitehall away from the king, it must have been easy for ministers to meet whenever and in such places as they chose. It may be that as much effective work could be done at Sir Robert Walpole's house in Chelsea, or at Newcastle's residence in Lincoln's Inn Fields, as in the secretary's office in the Cockpit, and with more intimacy and good cheer for those who assembled. However this be, at the beginning of the Hanoverian period private meetings of the important ministers have come to be usual, and in these meetings business of importance is discussed and decided. In 1719, when the fate of the peerage bill was hanging in the balance, the leaders finally decided that the measure should go to the Commons after they had deliberated in such a gathering.<sup>58</sup> On this occasion, Craggs supported the bill in the House of Commons, though, according to a contemporary, he opposed it "in the private consultations of the Ministers upon it".<sup>59</sup> Frequently, no doubt, these meetings were so small and informal as to be unimportant;<sup>60</sup> but the tendency was increasingly to make of them small cabinet meetings of the most influential members of the cabinet council. In 1722, the lord chancellor, the lord president, the lord chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire, Townshend, Walpole, and Carteret assembled at the Duke of Devonshire's house, and resolved upon measures to guard against a possible French invasion.<sup>61</sup> This was not a meeting of the cabinet, but it was a gathering of the most important and skilful members working in the manner which suited them best. By 1730 these meetings are being held, perhaps, as frequently as formal meetings of the cabinet, and a great deal of important policy and business of government is both considered and decided there.<sup>62</sup> This was true to a greater extent ten years later, when Sir John Norris attended.<sup>63</sup> After 1730 the number of private meetings is

<sup>58</sup> "I am informed . . . that at a private meeting of the Chief Ministers last night it was resolved to send it down to us to take its fate." Marquess of Granby to the Duke of Rutland. Rutland MSS., *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, 12, V. 193.

<sup>59</sup> Onslow MSS., *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, 14, IX. 459.

<sup>60</sup> For example: "I desire that you will be pleased to meet my Lord Townshend and me to morrow morning at Eleven o'clock at the Earl of Sunderland's house." Carteret to Sir John Eyles. St P. Dom., Entry Books, CXXI., November 30, 1721.

<sup>61</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., XXXI., April 23, 1722.

<sup>62</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, I., 1730.

<sup>63</sup> Journals, Add. MSS., 28,132, ff. 14, 63, 70, 80, 86, 87, 94, 95, 97, 99, 106, 109, 111 (1739), 114, 117, 120, 131, 141, 145, 147, 155, 166, 168, 190 (1740); *ibid.*, 28,133, ff. 6, 12, 14, 58, 61, 63, 67, 75, 77 (1740). Cf. also St. P. Dom., Various, II., August 13, 1739, January 11, 21, 28, February 4, 13, March 5, 1739/40, April 1, May 20, 1740; St. P. Dom., George II., LI., June 16, 19, July 2, 3, 1740; LII., September 8, 18, 1740; LIII., October 9, 14, November 20, 25, 27, 1740; LIV., December 2, 12, 1740.

probably as great as the number of meetings of the cabinet wherever held.

The relation between the private meeting and the formal meeting of the cabinet was, roughly, that in the smaller meetings of ministers preliminary consideration was given to business which later on would be decided upon in a gathering of the members of the cabinet, whose consent was necessary before the final decision could be taken. On October 29, 1739, Sir John Norris writes: "This Evening I was at a private meeting at Sr Robt Walpole house, the company being his selfe and Brother Horry the Duke of Newcastle and his Brother Henry Pelham the Duke of Grafton, Lord Harrington, Sr Charles Wager and my selfe." Here there was a long discussion about the best means of making an attack upon the possessions of Spain.<sup>64</sup> Two days later he records: "At 7 this Evening was a Counsell of the Cabinet at the Duke of Newcastle office, present his Grace and the Duke of Grafton and Dorsett Lord Pembroke and Ila, the Lord Chancellor Sr Robert Walpole Sr Charles Wager and my selfe."<sup>65</sup> The next day there was a similar gathering at Whitehall, at which were present the lord chancellor, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the earls of Pembroke and Ilay, Lord Harrington, Sir Robert Walpole, Sir Charles Wager, Sir John Norris, and the Duke of Newcastle. Here there was further consideration of Spanish matters, and it was decided what disposition should be made of certain booty, and what instructions should be sent to Haddock and Vernon with reference to the sailing of the *Flota* from Cadiz.<sup>66</sup> On May 22, 1740, the lord chancellor, the lord president, Sir Robert Walpole, Sir John Norris, and the Duke of Newcastle assembled at Sir Robert's house,<sup>67</sup> where they considered numerous details relating to naval matters, and agreed to summon the cabinet council.<sup>68</sup> Two days later there was a meeting of all the cabinet members at Whitehall.<sup>69</sup> Those who came were the lord chancellor, the lord president, the lord privy seal, the lord steward, the lord chamberlain, the dukes of Richmond, Bolton, Devonshire, and Montagu, the earls of Pembroke and Ilay, Sir Robert Walpole, Sir John Norris, and the Duke of Newcastle. The matters which had been discussed at Sir Robert's house were brought forward, given further consideration, and finally decided.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Add. MSS., 28,132, ff. 63-70.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 71.

<sup>66</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, II., November 1, 1739.

<sup>67</sup> Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 190.

<sup>68</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, II., May 20, 1740.

<sup>69</sup> "This Evening I was at the Duke of Newcastle office where all the Cabinet Counsell was present." Sir John Norris, *Journals*, Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 193.

<sup>70</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, II., May 22, 1740.

Private meetings were held at the houses of the cabinet leaders, usually at the residence of the prime minister. During the days of Walpole's supremacy, most of the gatherings were at his house; after 1742, most of them were at the Duke of Newcastle's or at the lord chancellor's, and occasionally elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> They took place for the most part in the evening. The attendance ranged from four or five to eight or ten, and sometimes more. Those usually present were the prime minister, the secretaries of state, and some of the cabinet members conspicuous because of ability,<sup>72</sup> or necessary because of political power. Outsiders, who had no cabinet position, were often called in, when their presence was desirable because of the nature of the business to be transacted, as Horatio Walpole, brother of Sir Robert and ambassador at the court of France, when diplomatic matters came before the meeting, or Admiral Sir John Norris, when naval affairs were under discussion. Meetings were held by agreement,<sup>73</sup> or as a result of messages or summons to individuals from Walpole or Newcastle.<sup>74</sup> There was apparently no set time. Frequently they took place every day or so;<sup>75</sup> sometimes long intervals elapsed between.

The business considered was, generally speaking, cabinet business of every kind, all sorts of foreign and domestic affairs coming up for discussion. At these meetings were taken up such matters as the political situation on the Continent and the proper policy of England as a consequence; the relations of England with France, Spain, Portugal, and the Empire; the representations of foreign ministers; the assisting of allies; the preparing of hostile measures against the king's enemies; the victualling, disposition, and despatching of troops; preparing ships, and ordering the admirals to attack, seize, burn, and destroy; encouraging colonial governors to give assistance against France and Spain; the consideration of colonial defense; the fostering of trade and commerce; preserving order at home, and suppressing mutinies and riots; considering the desires of the king and preparing answers to his representations; preparing the first form of the king's speeches; and deliberating about the proper management of Parliament.

<sup>71</sup> St. P. Dom., George I., George II., Various, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> Such, for example, was Lord Chancellor Hardwicke.

<sup>73</sup> Add. MSS., 32,687, f. 155.

<sup>74</sup> "On Saturday night the 19th of Febr: I was called to a Meeting at Sir Robt. Walpole's." Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS., 35,870, f. 19 (1737). "I had a letter from Mr Stone the Duke of Newcastle Secretary signifying I would mete his Grace at Sr Robert Walpoles at seven this Evening, which I did." Sir John Norris, Journals, Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 80 (1739).

<sup>75</sup> For example: *ibid.*, ff. 86 (December 5, 1739), 95 (December 11), 97 (December 14), 99 (December 17); St. P. Dom., George II., LIII., November 20, 25, 27, 1740.

At these meetings the cabinet leaders talked over and frequently settled such matters as how to mediate between Spain and Portugal, and how to bring about an understanding between Austria and Spain; the payment of a subsidy to the Queen of Hungary, and how to persuade her to yield to the inevitable without driving her into the arms of France; the effecting an accommodation between the king and the Prince of Wales; the exact terms of the instructions to the lords justices; the draft of a bill for Parliament; the report of the Spanish ambassador as to what his master would do to satisfy the complaints of the English court; the affairs of the South Sea Company; that Vice-Admiral Vernon should be ordered to do all possible damage to the Spaniards; detailed naval instructions for Sir John Norris; how many troops the plantations could raise to serve in the West Indies and how many they probably would raise; secret instructions to the colonial governors; a report of the Admiralty, and directions to the Admiralty about the sending of provisions to Jamaica; how to convict certain rioters in Edinburgh.

Minutes of these meetings were regularly taken, as they were also of cabinet meetings.<sup>76</sup> In neither case were they copied into a register, as was done with the records of the Privy Council. They seem to have been made solely for the temporary use of those who attended, and for the king, or for important ministers who were compelled to be absent. Sometimes several copies of the same minutes can be found.<sup>77</sup>

During this period it is probable that cabinet meetings were held as often as private meetings of the ministers. There seems to have been no exact regularity, but cabinets were summoned as the leaders desired, this being determined sometimes in cabinet and sometimes in private meetings.<sup>78</sup> On some occasions the smaller meeting comes before the larger one; again the private meetings are held almost to the exclusion of cabinets; at other times ministers seem to do their business altogether in meetings of the cabinet council. So far as there is any regularity, cabinet meetings appear to be held at intervals of one or two weeks;<sup>79</sup> but in times of stress or danger they occur every day, and sometimes twice a day.<sup>80</sup> The time of

<sup>76</sup> The State Papers Domestic, Various, are made up almost entirely of these minutes.

<sup>77</sup> Many of the duplicates are to be found in the Newcastle MSS. and in the Hardwicke Papers.

<sup>78</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, III., January 27, April 15, 1741.

<sup>79</sup> For example: Add. MSS., 28,132, ff. 169, 174, 180, 183, 193; St. P. Dom., Various, II., April 23, 28, 30, May 5, 6, 22, 1740.

<sup>80</sup> "I am very much ashamed, That I have not sooner return'd Your Lordp. my Thanks for the Honor of Your two Letters. . . . But I am persuaded Your Lordp. will have the Goodness to attribute it to the very great Hurry of Business

assembling is either arranged from one meeting to another,<sup>81</sup> or made known by summons issued from the office of the secretary of state.<sup>82</sup> Cabinets were usually held in the secretary's office in the Cockpit in Whitehall, for the most part in the evening.<sup>83</sup>

The attendance varied from five or six up to fourteen or fifteen, the usual number being ten or twelve. For the most part the cabinet was larger than the private meeting of the ministers, though occasionally this was not so.<sup>84</sup> Those who attended were the cabinet members who generally took part in the private meetings, that is, the prime minister, the secretaries of state, and the most important of the political leaders, and, in addition, cabinet members who were usually not to be found at the smaller gatherings, such as the archbishop, the great officers of the king's household, and the less important leaders. Apparently the great dignitaries could always attend, but since they were taking less and less part in the conduct of the important affairs of state, they often stayed away from the formal meetings of the cabinet for the same reason that they were not invited to the private gatherings.

So far as the procedure can be ascertained from the minutes, it would seem that the proceedings tended to become more and more perfunctory, having to do largely with the hearing, consideration, and approval of what had previously been worked out in the smaller meetings. Divisions were infrequent.<sup>85</sup> Except on very important occasions there was not much effective debate, and apparently not much real discussion, these things taking place for the most part in

I have been in, for some time past; (The Cabinet-Council meeting almost every Night, and some times twice in a Day . . .") Newcastle to Earl Poulet. St. P. Dom., George II., LXXVII., December 13, 1745. Cf. St. P. Dom., Various, V., September 20, 24 (twice), 26, 30, October 1, 4, 10, 15, November 14, 25, 27, 29, December 5, 6 (three times), 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 (twice), 14, 28, 1745.

<sup>81</sup> "Before we parted it was agreed that a Meeting of the whole Cabinet Council should be held on friday the 9th of Septr. at 10 o'clock in the evening, to consider of this weighty affair, and the Lords summoned the next morning . . . to the end they might not want sufficient notice." Hardwicke's account, Add. MSS., 35,870, f. 26.

<sup>82</sup> "The Lords of the Cabinet Council being to meet, at My Lord Duke of Newcastle's Office, in the Cockpit, tomorrow, at Eleven o'Clock, in the Forenoon. I am order'd by His Grace, to desire, that You would be pleased to meet their Lordships there, at that Hour." Andrew Stone to Sir John Norris. Add. MSS., 28,132, f. 33.

<sup>83</sup> St. P. Dom., *passim*.

<sup>84</sup> There was a meeting of ten at Sir Robert Walpole's, August 25, 1735, and one of eight on September 15. Meanwhile there were two cabinets at Whitehall of eight and seven respectively. St. P. Dom., Various, I., August 25, September 2, 4, 15, 1735. For a meeting of thirteen at Newcastle House, cf. *ibid.*, V., February 5, 1746/7.

<sup>85</sup> For an instance, cf. St. P. Dom., Various, IV., November 24, 1743.

the private meetings.<sup>86</sup> It is not clear that the prime minister presided, or exercised any formal or unquestioned authority. Such a man as Walpole or Pitt could, indeed, make his authority felt and obeyed, but this leadership was rather the personal leadership of Walpole or Pitt than the official authority of a premier. Frequently he controlled his associates with difficulty, and sometimes not at all.<sup>87</sup> During the entire period the leadership of the cabinet may be said to be in the hands of the two or three most important and influential members, such as Stanhope and Sunderland, Walpole and Newcastle, Newcastle and Hardwicke and Pelham, Newcastle and Pitt, rather than in the hands of the prime minister alone. The proceedings and decisions were written down as "minutes", to be read, sometimes, at the beginning of the next meeting.<sup>88</sup> A foul copy was made usually by one of the secretaries of state, or by one of the under-secretaries, from rough memoranda furnished by his master. A fair or often an amended copy was sent to the king, while other copies were made for the principal members, and sometimes, apparently, by the members themselves.<sup>89</sup>

In the cabinet were considered all sorts of matters, foreign, domestic, colonial, parliamentary, and diplomatic. At these meetings the final draft of the king's speech was decided upon. Approval was given to answers to foreign ministers, or to English ministers abroad. Questions of policy and diplomacy were settled. Treaties were arranged. All sorts of military and naval business were despatched. Communications from the colonies were received and answered. Petitions were read and complaints considered. Measures were taken to maintain security and preserve the peace. The desires and commands of the king were considered, answers were returned to him through the prime minister, and advice was given him as to what he should do.

As examples of business before the cabinet may be cited: the supporting of the Pragmatic Sanction; crushing the Pretender in 1745; continuing a treaty with Hesse Cassel; replying to M. de Broglie's memorial; adjusting a dispute between Spain and Portugal; the consideration of military works erected by the Spaniards near Gibraltar; the ordering of reprisals upon Spanish commerce; the draft of a declaration of war; conferring with the lords com-

<sup>86</sup> In 1743, the question of giving assistance to Maria Theresa was thoroughly debated. Add MSS., 35,870, ff. 59-62. Cf. *ibid.*, f. 85.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Hardwicke Papers, Add. MSS., 35,407, ff. 44, 53; Lord Hervey, *Memoirs of the Reign of George the Second*, etc. (Philadelphia, 1848), II. 414, 415.

<sup>88</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, II., September 25, 1739; V., March 28, 1744.

<sup>89</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, *passim*, and the papers of Newcastle and Hardwicke.

missioners of the admiralty; preparing drafts of instructions for the admirals; advising with the Board of Trade about the protection of Nova Scotia; hearing a memorial about Dutch ships detained by the embargo in Ireland; reading the petition of the South Sea Company in regard to the Asiento trade; measures for putting into effect a law to encourage trade in the West Indies; instructions for the postmaster-general; suppressing seditious matter written and printed; and the framing of a message from the king to the Prince of Wales.

It may be seen that the business transacted in the formal meetings of the cabinet was largely the same as that brought up in private meetings. The difference, so far as it existed, was that at first the consideration in the smaller groups was rather of a preliminary character. At Sir Robert Walpole's house business was considered and arranged so that with order and precision it might be considered and decided in Whitehall or at Kensington. But gradually an important development can be traced out. At first the private meeting merely prepares and the cabinet decides. In the smaller meeting is done the less important work; in the larger, the more important. Then, after a while, the smaller group becomes so powerful that what it prepares is decided in the larger group largely as it intends. There is now little difference between what is done in the private meeting and what is carried on in the cabinet council. Finally, the small group overshadows the large one, and at Newcastle House or at the lord chancellor's are decided important questions of politics or diplomacy which are brought to the cabinet merely for formal acquiescence, or are not reported at all.<sup>90</sup> It may be remarked that the relations between the private meetings of the principal ministers and the cabinet councils are entirely similar to those existing between the private meetings and the meetings of the lords justices, who ruled as regents while the sovereign was out of the realm.

After 1745 it becomes very difficult to distinguish a private meeting from a meeting of the cabinet, and so entirely has one absorbed the power of the other, that it is probable that the meetings which were now held in the houses of the chief ministers were really small cabinet meetings.<sup>91</sup> In 1757 the Duke of Newcastle speaks of the smaller group as the "*conciliabulum*",<sup>92</sup> and about the same time he alludes to the "*Committee of the Cabinet Council*".<sup>93</sup> There

<sup>90</sup> St. P. Dom., Various, IV., November 10, 1743.

<sup>91</sup> As late as 1755, however, Newcastle speaks of "the Private Meetings of the King's Servants". Add. MSS., 32,996, f. 227.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 35,416, f. 181.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 32,997, f. 207.

was, then, by this time, some recognition of that which had long existed, a double cabinet system. There were now, as has been well said, an inner and an outer cabinet.<sup>94</sup> There was a body of sixteen or more, consulted in supreme crises for advice and assistance, but otherwise only for formal approbation. Beside it was a group of four or six or ten, as suited the leaders, which did the planning and the considering and the deciding, and was the real cabinet and the real governing body of the kingdom.

It has been my purpose to trace in some detail the manner in which the Privy Council, as it enlarged, gave over its initiative and power to the committee of council and the cabinet; also the manner in which the cabinet became the principal heir to this authority; and then, how in process of time the cabinet, enlarging, lost the greater part of its real importance to the private meeting or conciliabulum or inner cabinet, which had been brought forth from itself. Such a record is apt to be as cold and lifeless and dull as the crackling documents from which it is drawn. Yet behind it are the men and deeds of the past. And sometimes as the student wearily searching his manuscripts lingers for a moment, he catches once more a gleam of this dead past. Almost he can see the groups assembling at the Cockpit or at Chelsea or at Powis House. Almost he can hear the solemn deliberation, the lively discussion, the opinions of the leaders, the objections of those who would lead but may not. Again he knows the commanding patience of Sir Robert, the industry and pettiness of Newcastle, the wisdom of Philip Yorke, the cunning of Pelham, the pathetic zeal of Sir John Norris, and the imperial arrogance of Pitt. Then the voices hush, the vision fades, and revery dies; and once more he holds in his hand the cryptic scrawl of some minister of bygone days or the minutes which some secretary of state prepared long ago for the king.

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<sup>94</sup> Temperley, *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XXVII. 682.